Christ Lutheran Church

Stouchsburg, Pennsylvania

Built 1785-1786

A Church of the Pioneers' Faith. Sponsored by Christ Lutheran Sunday School. Written by Irene M. Stupp.

Rieth's Church drawn by Viola Kohl Mohn, from a model owned by Forrest Ganster, Stouchsburg.

By the Tulpehocken

How breathtakingly beautiful it is to stand at the parsonage window viewing the sunset reflected in the slow-moving water of the Tulpehocken creek. The visible tracing of the Union Canal twisting alongside the stream adds a touch of the past, of history, of man's imagination and ingenuity. What remains of the formerly huge walnut trees gives an eerie feeling, a sense of mystery. They project from the ground, sombre and rather spectacular in their way. Planted years ago at the side of the towpath to add dignity to man's creation, now their limbs and branches are strewn haphazardly over the ground. Yet, they add a touch of undisturbed beauty to the quiet evening hour as the sun sets.

The Palatines' journey had been long. Run off their farms, chased from their homes and Vaterland, they had traveled for miles over the rough roads. They had said goodbye to many friends and neighbors and had witnessed many others, including women and children, die by the roadside. The dead were buried there.

Their journey ended at the edge of the Tulpehocken creek, where man watched the reflection of the sunset in the slow-moving stream, and the children dipped the tips of their fingers ever so gently in the cool, soft water. The trout flipped and disappeared downstream. The ringneck rose from the underbrush on its magnificent wings, and the deer disappeared over the rolling hillside. The woodchuck quietly slipped back into its hole.

Here they carved out pieces of land, built homes and barns, churches and cemeteries. The agony, pain and suffering were gone. A new life lay before them. It was an ending and a beginning by the waters of the Tulpehocken.

Two hundred fifty years have come and gone. During all but twenty of those years, Christ Lutheran Church has welcomed travelers, guests and visitors. It is a privilege for us this year to host the annual meeting of The Pennsylvania German Society, to greet members of The Tulpehocken Settlement Historical Society, and to meet families who proudly trace their roots to the first settlers in the Tulpehocken area. We join you in this anniversary celebration.

This booklet, sponsored by Christ Lutheran Sunday School and written by Irene M. Stupp, is published for your enrichment. Miss Stupp has drawn from the Christ Church records and other historical data many significant facts, colorful events and humorous anecdotes.

A Church of the Pioneers' Faith is a story of Lutheran people, who in their determined efforts to hold fast to their Christian faith and doctrines were brutally uprooted in The Vaterland and found a new beginning by the waters of the Tulpehocken.

The 230th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone, May 12, 1743, for Christ Church's first building.

At the Parsonage
The First Sunday in Lent,
March 11, 1973
Lars Birger Staaby,
Pastor

One of the earliest tombstones in the old cemetery (1752).

History of Christ Church

As the 230th anniversary of the founding of Christ Church coincides with the 250th anniversary of the arrival of our Palatine ancestors in the Tulpehocken area, most of this history is a resume of life in this congregation in Colonial days and the early 19th century.

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On May 13, 1723, when George I was King of England, approximately 33 German families arrived in the Tulpehocken area. They settled along the Tulpehocken creek, the first white inhabitants in this region.

Soon after their arrival, some of these religious German immigrants banded together to form a Lutheran congregation. During the first few years the people met in homes, conducting the services themselves.

Rieth's Church

As the Tulpehocken settlers were anxious to worship in a church building, a meeting was called in 1727 to discuss this matter. Families within a 20-mile radius were invited to assemble at a block-house on Mill creek, near Newmanstown. There was a large attendance. All the men were armed, ready to protect their families from wilderness dangers and Indians.

The meeting opened with the Reformation hymn, "Ein Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott." Pastor John Casper Stoever, from Lancaster County, led the group in prayer. Adam Rieth (Reed) presided. Upon motion by George Scholl, it was unanimously voted to build a church on land donated by Adam, Christopher and John Rieth. The site was on an elevation, about half a mile east of Stouchsburg, where Reed's Cemetery is now located.

In less than five months a small log meeting-house was built. Young and old worked together, felling trees, digging foundations and cutting stone. The church was built so it could be used as a fort in case of Indian attack. Guns and ammunition were stored in a vault under the earthern floor.

In October, 1727, the building was dedicated, with Rev. Stoever officiating. This church was a rude structure. The pulpit was made from rough boards. The clergy chair was fashioned from a block of a tree. The pews were hewn from logs.

The early church buildings in the Tulpehocken settlement were crude, usually a small log or stone meeting-house, with tile or wood shingle roof. Many of these simple buildings did not have stoves. (Toward the end of the 18th century, when churches began to install stoves, there was strong opposition from some members to this innovation).

During the first six years, the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation at Tulpehocken (later known as Zion's or Rieth's Church) did not have a pastor. The congregation met every Sunday, sang hymns, prayed, and were served by a reader (vorleser), who read the Gospel and a sermon. This was not satisfactory because "the people were willing to allow any straggler to preach a sermon, since a regularly prepared and ordained pastor was not to be had in those times."

Hazardous Sea Voyage

In 1742, the Rev. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, who became the patriarch of the Lutheran church in America, arrived in Philadelphia. Muhlenberg's trip to this country was doubtless typical of the hazardous, disagreeable voyages endured by the Palatines who came to America early in the 18th century.

In those days, it was considered dangerous to cross the ocean, even in a new ship. The two-masted vessel on which Muhlenberg travelled was old, crowded, overrun by rats, and infested with vermin. There was also the constant fear of being attacked by pirates.

Muhlenberg detested the cursing of the crew, and the military duty which the passengers were forced to share. In spite of these depressing conditions, the German minister held Sunday services, and gave spiritual counsel to passengers and crew who consulted him.

Muhlenberg was sent to this country by the church authorities in Halle, Germany. The congregations in Pensylvania had appealed for help. There were many problems: dissension between various sects; factions and fighting in some Lutheran congregations because of false pastors; and a great lack of ministers for the German immigrants who were arriving in large numbers.

Breach in Congregation

By 1743, after almost a decade of internal strife, the Lutheran congregation at Tulpehocken was divided. The conflict was so bitter and involved it became known as the Tulpehocken Confusion. The group which formed a new congregation, called Christ Church, were clamoring for a pastor.

That same year Tobias Wagner, a missionary from Wurtemberg, Germany, came to Pennsylvania and visited Muhlenberg. The Lutheran leader recommended that Christ Church call Wagner, and he began his duties in 1743.

Christ Church Records

Church records are often considered a register of statistics, business transactions and routine activities of a congregation. But they can also be a congregation's biography, containing exciting stories and accounts of the church's material and spiritual growth.

Christ Church has church records dating back to the founding of the congregation in 1743. The pages in the vellum bound volumes are discolored by age and the writing is in German script, with occasional Latin phrases. The title page of the first volume is inscribed:

> "Evangelical Lutheran Church Book of the Baptized, the Communicants, the Married, the Deceased, the Elected Pastors, Deacons and Trustees of Church Property of the So-called Christ Church in Tulpehocken. Keep us in the truth, grant eternal liberty, to praise Thy Name, through Jesus Christ. Amen!"

Land Deeded

Land for the original church building was provided by three church members — Sebastian Fischer, Christian Lauer and George Unrah. Christ Church's Account Book states that each man sold five acres of land for one English shilling. These 15 acres were sold "for all time to come without violation for the sum of one English shilling to the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation at Tulpehocken for the erection of an Evangelical Lutheran Church and School."

Cornerstone Laid

On Ascension Day, May 12, 1743, the cornerstone was laid in the original building. At this ceremony, the following articles were placed in a walnut box, and deposited in the cavity: a Bible containing the Gospels bound in leather, a bottle of water, some wheat bread (ein weisz Broedlein), and a bottle of wine.

There was also a copy of a letter addressed to the members of Christ Church and their future descendants, exhorting them to remain true to Evangelical Lutheran Doctrines.

The letter concluded with the following notation: "For the information of our descendants, this writing was duplicated, completed and signed with like contents. One copy of the same is deposited in the corner stone with the articles named and the other is kept by the Congregation so that in all time to come our will and agreement may be seen, unnecessary contentions may be avoided and all strife and offense may be peaceably prevented. As present witness of the same, the following have subscribed. . ." 166 names were listed on the paper.

Important Marriage

Included in Wagner's marriage records was the following entry: "Friday after Easter, 1745. His Most Worthy Rev. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, Most meritorious Lutheran Minister, and Miss Anna Maria Weiser, legit. single daughter of the Highly honored Justice, Conrad Weiser."

First Church in Wilderness

Free-will contributions from Christ Church members enabled the congregation to erect the first church building. Begun in 1743, it was

completed in 1751. The Account Book contained a list of contributors in 1747. Both men and women made donations. Sometimes the donors were identified only as "The Widow Emerich," or "The old man Schwartz." 14 pounds, 1 shilling and 2 pence were subscribed. (In provincial days a pound — 20 shillings — was worth $2.42.)

The original foundation stones are under the driveway west of the present church.

The first building did not provide a view of rich farmland and lush meadows. At that time, this area was forest-land, abounding with game. Deer, bears, wild turkeys and many other animals and birds were plentiful. The land was sparsely settled. Primitive roads and Indian trails led to the isolated homes of parishioners. Most of these homes were log cabins. Near Christ Church there was an Indian encampment, along the Tulpehocken creek.

Kurtz's Ordination

Johann Nicolas Kurtz was the first minister at Christ Church to have a long pastorate. In 1746, when he began his 24-year term, Kurtz was not yet ordained. He therefore carried out his duties under the supervision of ordained pastors.

On August 14-15, 1748, two important events occurred at St. Michael's Church, Philadelphia. The first meeting of the Ministerium (Synod) of Pennsylvania was held, and Kurtz was ordained in the presence of church dignitaries, including Muhlenberg.

Prior to his ordination, Kurtz was given a thorough examination by a group of pastors. The profound, theological questions which the candidate was asked would be difficult for even today's ministers to answer readily.

Kurtz's examination papers were sent to the Lutheran church authorities in Halle. Dr. Gotthelf Francke, head of the Halle Institution, wrote back that Kurtz had answered the questions better than one out of ten preachers in the German consistories would have done. Then there was this interesting postscript, "But please don't tell Mr. Kurtz this."

Large and Scattered Parish

Kurtz had a large charge in the Tulpehocken settlement. In addition to Christ Church, he was pastor of Rieth's Church, Stouchsburg; the church in Heidelberg, known as Eck or Corner Church; Nord Keil (Bernville), and Altalaha (Atolhoe) Rehrersburg.

In carrying out his duties, Kurtz had to face the hazards of travelling through a wilderness. In those days, Tulpehocken and other settlements were widely scattered. Ministers had to travel long distances, in all kinds of weather, to visit their parishioners. Sometimes these hardy men were the first to cut trails through the trackless forests. Travel was by foot

or horseback. On steep mountain trails they sometimes had to dismount and drive the horse ahead. They often had to spend the night in the open. Even men of robust health found these hardships taxing.

There was also great danger from marauding Indians. During the French and Indian wars (1754-1763) many Christ Church members were victims of Indian ferocity. Homes and barns were burned, and crops destroyed. Sometimes entire families were murdered, scalped or taken prisoner by the enemy.

During the Indian uprising in the Stouchsburg area in 1755, Conrad Weiser assembled a force of several hundred men to march against hostile Indians, who were approaching the Swatara. The meeting place was the limestone mansion at the west end of town, then the home of Peter Spycker, chief judicial officer of Berks County in Colonial days.

Weiser asked Kurtz to come to the Spycker house "to give an exhortation to the men, and offer a suitable prayer."

Weiser's men were resolute, but lacked equipment. Some were armed only with axes and pitchforks.

As Indians raids spread through this area, and stories of the settlers' terrifying experiences circulated, some settlements in the Blue Mountain section became deserted. Even the citizens of Reading were concerned about their safety.

Settlers in the Tulpehocken region were so incensed by the atrocities committed by Indians that in 1756 a recommendation was sent to the Governor, stating that bounties should be paid for Indian prisoners and scalps. The amount set was $150 for every male prisoner over ten years of age, if delivered to a government fort or town; and $130 for every Indian scalp of males over ten years of age.

During the long months of terror and constant danger it took courage for these pioneer families to attend services at Christ Church. On July 5, 1757, Kurtz sent a letter to Muhlenberg, advising that seven people in one family had been murdered and scalped by Indians that morning.

Two women whom he confirmed in 1766 — Catherine Schmidt and Elizabeth Seibert — were captives of the Indians during the war years.

Legend of Regina

Christ Church is connected with one of the most stirring stories of Indian abduction. The legend is known as "Regina, the German Captive."

On October 16, 1755, nine-year old Regina Leininger was captured during an Indian raid not far from present-day Selinsgrove. Among the other captives were her sister, Barbara, and Marie LeRoy, a neighbor.

A few months later, Regina was separated from the other girls. It is probable that Barbara and Regina never saw each other again.

After three and a half years of captivity, Barbara, Marie and several other prisoners managed to escape to Fort Pitt (Pittsburgh). From there, the two girls were taken to Philadelphia where they dictated a statement about their capture in 1755, and described their experiences while captives of the Indians.

Regina Leininger was taken to an Indian camp many miles from her home. For eight dreary years, the girl endured the hardships of Indian life. After the defeat of the French and Indians in western Pennsylvania in 1763, notices were published in all the Pennsylvania newspapers that a large number of white children had been found in Indian camps.

By that time, Mrs. Leininger "had fled to the interior settlements at Tulpehocken" and was one of Kurtz's parishioners. He persuaded Regina's mother to go to Carlisle where parents of lost children had been told to seek their sons and daughters.

During her long imprisonment, Regina had forgotten how to speak German. Exposure had turned her fair complexion swarthy. Her light hair had become coarse and dark.

Regina's appearance was so changed that Mrs. Leininger did not recognize the tall Indian girl, and Regina did not remember her mother. As a last resort, Mrs. Leininger began to sing a familiar German hymn, "Allein, und doch nicht ganz allein" ("Alone, and yet not all alone am I.") The girl sang a few words in halting German, ran forward, and embraced her mother.

Ruins of the first parsonage, built in 1747.

In 1765, Muhlenberg included the story of Regina's capture in a pastoral report to the University of Halle, in Germany.

The Old Cemetery

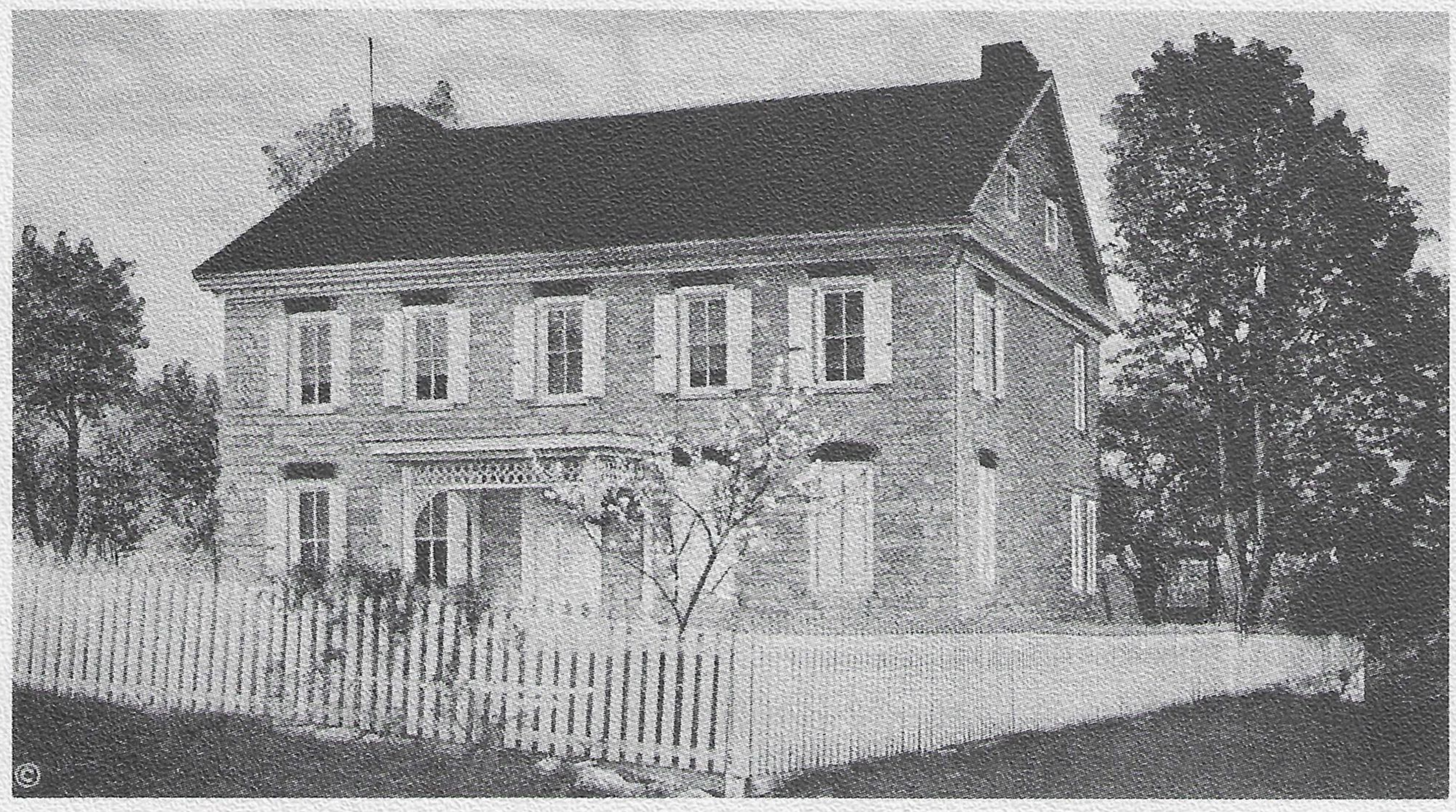
Regina was buried in the old cemetery to the west of Christ Church. A monument marks the grave.

The following Revolutionary soldiers were buried in this cemetery: Johannes Anspach, John Peter Anspach, Peter Brud, (John) Peter Etchborger, Ensign George Gensemer, Andreas Groff, John Katterman (Kalderman); Col. Christian Lauer, Christian Leshner (Lesher), Cap. Jacob Livingood, Peter Stein, John Walborn, Martin Walborn, Jacob Weiser.

Many German settlers were also buried there. Some were victims of Indian raids. The older headstones are made from sandstone. A number of tombstones date back to the 18th century. The epitaphs on these stones are in German.

There are also many graves of infants and young children. Often, the figure of a lamb is carved on the stone.

These memorials are mute evidence of the prevalence of infectious diseases in Colonial days, and even in the latter part of the 19th century. Diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles, typhoid fever, tuberculosis, and small pox were some of the scourges that killed many children. It was not uncommon for a family to lose half a dozen children in a short time during an epidemic of one of these dread diseases.



The present parsonage. Picture taken in 1908 following renovation.

In 1755, Christ Church members gave contributions to enclose the burial ground (cemetery) with a wall. One interesting feature of this wall is still visible. Near the northeast corner, steps were built into the wall to assist women and children in mounting horses.

Church's First Pews

It was during Kurtz's pastorate, in 1747, that Conrad Weiser advanced money to Christ Church to furnish the building with pews. Prior to that, the church had none. Doubtless these pews were a welcome gift, as ministers were expected to preach a sermon lasting at least two hours.

In 1748, Weiser was one of nine men elected to Church Council. Four deacons were also elected. The names of these men indicated their German background. Typical surnames were Walborn, Schwingel, Anspach, Hollstein, Creuser, Immel, Koppenheefer, Mueller, Batdorff, and Fischer.

Rating of Catechumens

That same year, pastor Kurtz made various entries in the church records which contain much human interest. Under the heading, "The Confirmed," he listed the names of those confirmed that year, then added comments regarding each person.

The notation began, "Twice a week from Easter to Whitsunday, the following children were instructed before me, Johann Nicolas Kurtz, in our pure Lutheran Doctrine. On Whitsunday, after examination in Christ Church, Tulpehocken, they were publicly confirmed and then admitted to the Holy Supper."

Some of these entries included:

"John Weiser—22—medium in knowledge
George Graff (Graeff)—18—rather poor
John Jacob Geib—17—servant of Mrs. Graff—will pass
Andrew Kutzmuller (Kitzmiller)—15—literally excellent
Anna Maria Etzberger—19—a good reader
Nicholas Schaffer—20—peculiar disposition
Susanna Braun (Brown)—good and honest soul
Wendel Muller—still poor
Adam Schaeffer—20—cannot read but has an honorable disposition
Maria Brosmann—16—poor, but made progress in school
Philip Brenner—14—is very timid
Maria Margaret Ley—15—very good
Eva Catharine Illig—18—is bright
John Jacob Rith (Rieth, Reed)—irreverent disposition
Henry Battorf—18—is clever
Christian Kashniz (Karsnitz)—16—is reverent
Maria Elizabeth Stup(p)—16—so-so

May the dear Saviour protect these plants, and by the help of the Holy Spirit, wherever they may lack, supply that which is of in-born good in them, and in the future guard them from temptation, is the wish and prayer of their pastor — Johann Nicolas Kurtz."

Church Grows

During the 20-year period from 1743 to 1763 the assets of this pioneer Lutheran congregation increased substantially. These included: a church building, parsonage, school house, and enclosed burial ground.

Following were some of the expenditures listed in the Account Book:

"Peter Conrad, mason, 37 lbs. and 20 bushels of wheat; John Immel's servant, for digging, 5 shillings; To Bleistein's 3 girls, 2 days clearing and cleaning meadow, 6 shillings; For boarding of both masons and carpenter, Nicolas Weygandt, at 8 pence per day, amounting to 14 shillings; For rum for the workmen, 10 shillings, 6 pence; To Jacob Beyer, for hauling and moving schoolmaster, 1 lb.; Due George Lechner, for hauling the schoolmaster's goods from Philadelphia, 2 lbs., 5 shillings."

Parsonage Erected

In 1747, the congregation began to erect a parsonage. Some of the supplies listed in the Account Book were: lime, glass, wood, nails, shingles, bricks, pine boards, chalk, iron hinges, and wages for carpenter, mason and locksmith.

(In the years 1771-73 members made subscriptions for the erection of a new parsonage. 109 persons subscribed 341 lbs., 5 shillings toward the cost. One interesting notation in the Account Book stated: "Simon Koppenhoefer paid 5 lbs. Subscription confessed even if he should move away.")

In 1752, the members bought an organ from John Clem, in Philadelphia. Miscellaneous expenses included these items:

"To the man who brought organ builder here, trouble and expenses, 17 shillings, 6 pence; For hauling organ up from Philadelphia, 2 lbs., 6 shillings; For 3 quarts wine for organ builder, 6 shillings; For bellows blower, since erection of organ, 1 shilling, 6 pence; For organ builder's assistant, drinking and spending money, 1 lb."

In 1763, Christ Church congregation bought a tract of land from Peter Leddermann, in order to obtain additional ground for the minister. They paid 92 pounds for 15 acres and 60 rods.

The congregation paid the expenses of delegates attending synod meetings. In 1774, John Weiser was paid 1 lb., 10 shillings, 10 pence for serving as a delegate.

Church Schools

The early German settlers were also concerned about education for their children. In 1758, the congregation began to build a two-story

schoolhouse. Some of the supplies included tiles, bricks, glass, boards, table, benches, and stoves for upper and lower schoolrooms. Wages were paid for smithing, carpenter, masons, stone breakers, artisans, helpers, making two stairs, and setting up lime kiln.

The church schools established by the Palatine immigrants were governed by precise rules. The regulations about behavior were explicit: Unruly scholars were to be sharply reproved by the teacher. If this didn't help, the matter was to be referred to the parents. If this didn't produce results, the trouble was to be discussed in the presence of the deacons. (An intriguing note was added to this rule: "Caution—Larger scholars should by all means be first admonished privately.")

According to the School Code of 1743 in the Tulpehocken area, when congregations had their own pastor he was responsible for supervision of the school. In this Code, the teacher's salary and duties were specified. To wit: He was to be paid 25 cents per pupil for a term of several months. He also received $25 a year for acting as organist. Half of this was paid in produce, at market prices.

Fringe benefits included the following: He could live in one end of the schoolhouse, rent free. He was also given plenty of firewood, and feed for one cow.

One teacher also wanted to keep a horse. Permission was granted, provided he performed his duties faithfully. In addition, he had to cultivate several acres of ground. (It was actually the duty of the members to do this chore.) He also agreed to keep the fences in repair. In return, the congregation consented to give the teacher one bushel of oats, and several bundles of straw for his horse.

Ministers' Wages Low

In Colonial days, ministers' wages were meager. One example of how little they received was recorded in Muhlenberg's diary in 1764. At that time, his charge consisted of three congregations: in Philadelphia, New Hanover (Swamp), and New Providence (Trappe). His parishioners were poor and pay infrequent.

Muhlenberg commented that it had been a good day. While making calls on sick members he had received two donations toward his salary. Each parishioner gave him 15 shillings. Muhlenberg wrote that he was especially happy to receive those gifts as he could now repay his household maid 7 shillings, 6 pence he had borrowed from her to tide his family over a period when he was short of money.

Rules for Church Members

The Palatines' love of order and system was apparent in their church regulations. In the 18th century, some of the rules in Tulpehocken churches included: "No person shall be considered a member of this congregation who is not willing to have his name recorded in the church

book. Such a self-willed person shall not be served by our teacher (pastor), neither shall his children be baptized nor he be allowed to partake Holy Communion."

"Two deacons shall be elected from members of the church every year, or as often as necessary. They shall be honest, free from coarse, prevailing sins and vices, and such as have good judgment."

"Deacons shall keep a watchful eye on members of the congregation and admonish such as lead disorderly lives, or inform the pastor so that such may be admonished and put in mind of their ways, especially at communion time. Each and every member shall state and at the same time subscribe the amount of money that he wishes to give each year for the support of the preacher, and at the end of the year hand such to the deacons."

(On one agreement, pledges of the members varied from 2 shillings, 6 pence to 1 lb.)

Farewell to Missionary

Some of the missionaries sent to Tulpehocken from Halle were highly esteemed by their friends. Christopher Emanuel Schulze, Kurtz's successor in 1770, was given a farewell party by some of the townspeople.

The following citation was read: "Farewell to Missionary Schulze. On the Departure from Halle, June 22, 1765, of the right noble highly learned gentleman, Rev. Christopher Emanuel Schulze. Pastor-elect of the Christian Congregation in Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania. Their dearest, beloved Friend. A few of His Good Friends and Fellow Citizens Accompanied him with their best wishes and commended themselves to his friendly regard."

This was followed by a long poem of farewell.

Schulze was Muhlenberg's son-in-law. The Schulze's third child, John Andrew Melchior Schulze, born in the present parsonage, was Governor of Pennsylvania, 1823-29.

Present Church Building

Christ Church's present attractive building was erected in 1785-86. The interior was Colonial. At the sesqui-centennial celebration in 1893, Dr. F. J. F. Schantz, Myerstown, delivered the sermon. During his talk, Dr. Schantz said, "I rejoice with many of you that we can remember the appearance of the church before it was remodeled (in 1885). The arched windows, the three large doors, the high galleries on the three sides of the church, the straight, high-backed pews, the wine-glass-shaped pulpit with sounding board above it, the large altar in front of the pulpit, the two large stoves near the centre of the floor, and the large organ in the central gallery are all well remembered."

At that time, entrance to the church was on the west side. Today, on the south wall, the original architecture can still be seen, and the outline of the arched windows, mentioned by Dr. Schantz, is visible.

Settlement Expands

A century after the arrival of the first Palatines, the tiny settlements in the Tulpehocken region had expanded into towns, and public works were being completed. In 1817, the Berks and Dauphin Turnpike (now route 422) was completed, at an average cost of $3,800 per mile.

The Union Canal, connecting the Schuylkill River at Reading with the Susquehanna at Middletown, was opened in 1828.

The church records that year contain this entry: "The congregation instructed its trustees John Walborn and Jacob Winter to convey to the Union Canal Company, the land occupied by the said company, the said company paying the said trustees $40.00 per acre for the land occupied as aforesaid, and $25 for other injuries done, etc."

It was during the pastorate of the Rev. A. Johnson Long that a catastrophe occurred. On November 6, 1884, a dynamite factory exploded, a quarter mile from the church. The building was damaged so badly that only the thick limestone walls remained.

Members of the congregation were stunned by the misfortune. Many were discouraged at the prospect of rebuilding and refurnishing the church. However, under Long's capable leadership, the members went ahead with the renovations. The cost was $6,500.

One year later, on December 26, 1885, the church was consecrated. Dr. Schantz delivered the sermon.

Two years later, joy and pride in the renovated church were changed to sorrow. On August 1, 1887, the building was struck by lightning. In a few hours, nothing was left but the four stone walls. Once more Christ Church members looked at church ruins with sad faces and heavy hearts.

Pastor and congregation, faced with the problem of reconstruction, did not hesitate. Within one month they voted to rebuild the church. Work was begun immediately. On October 6-7, 1888, the church was rededicated. Expense of rebuilding was $7,500. Part of this was covered by $6,500 received from insurance.

German Language Predominates

During the first decades of the settlements in Berks County, four languages were used in Lutheran churches — German, English, Swedish and French. By mid-century, the last two had disappeared. For more than a century, German was used almost exclusively by Lutheran congregations. Efforts to introduce English were opposed bitterly. Some congregations were actually divided because of the language question.

It was not until 1909 that German ceased to be the predominant language used in services at Christ Church. Beginning that year, services alternated between English and German. The one exception was the communion service when classes were confirmed. On that occasion, the service was always in English.

Nine years later, the congregation ordered that there should be three services in English to one in German. It was not until the early 1920s that the ruling was made that all church services should be in English.

In 1922, Christ Church passed a milestone. For 179 years, women had not been allowed to vote on church matters. Finally, on July 2, women suffrage was established, and they were permitted to vote on matters regarding the affairs of the church.

Modern History

By 1938, there were further innovations, changes and improvements. The minister wore a clerical gown for services; electricity had been installed in the church building and on the grounds; a new Moller organ had been bought; the interior of the church redecorated; a new cemetery added to the north of the church; a pavilion and bandstand erected in the church grove, and a stone and bronze bulletin board placed at the entrance to the driveway. Church property had increased to approximately 35 acres.

During the last 35 years, there were other important events. The first step was taken to change from a multiple parish. It was decided that the churches at Newmanstown, Richland and Millbach would comprise the Millcreek Lutheran Church. Stouchsburg and Rehrersburg became a joint parish.

In 1959, during the pastorate of the Rev. George Myers, Jr., a final vote was taken to have Christ Church become a single parish. On December 1 of that year this became effective.

That was a year of important decisions for Christ Church members. Aware of the pressing need for additional educational facilities, the congregation considered the possibility of embarking on a major building program.

On November 26, 1961, after two years of study, the congregation approved a renovation program, and construction of an educational unit was begun. Cost was $130,000, exclusive of furnishings.

The education-fellowship unit was the first new construction project at Christ Church since the erection of the second church building in 1786. Dedication services for this building were held during the week of March 31, 1963.

Another forward step was the opening of a church library on March 22, 1964. The library now contains 1,100 books, modern audio-visual equipment, 94 filmstrips, and many slides.

On May 8, 1965, the West Berks District, which then comprised 26 rural congregations, sponsored a church library workshop at Christ Church. This was the first church library workshop held by a Lutheran church in the East.

Another outstanding event occurred at Christ Church on August 23, 1964 when Anne Fichthorn, member of the congregation, was commissioned for a three-year term as an educational missionary at the Stall School for Girls, Guntur, India. She was the first woman from Christ Church to enter full-time church work, and the first missionary to be commissioned from the West Berks District.

225th Anniversary Celebration

In 1968, the congregation observed the 225th anniversary with a week of celebration. On May 19, speaker at the morning service was Rev. Fred Blank, assistant to the president, Eastern Pennsylvania Synod, Lutheran Church in America, and chairman of the Department of Town and Country. That afternoon, there was a reunion of all confirmation classes.

On May 23, Ascension Day, an evening communion service was held.

Final event was on May 26, when Dr. Hagen Staack, professor of religion, Muhlenberg College, and well-known TV personality, was guest speaker.

That same year, further improvements were made to the church. The interior was redecorated. The walls and ceiling of the nave were repainted, and new carpet laid.

Tremendous Progress

If the ancestors of the present members of Christ Church could have looked into the future and seen the remarkable changes that would take place in their church, they would have thought such progress fantastic.

Even at the beginning of the 20th century, the hard-working ministers often had difficulty in visiting their parishioners. Frequently, roads were impassable. With one minister serving multiple, scattered parishes a church service could not be held every Sunday in all congregations. Communion services were scheduled infrequently.

The diverse activities which are routine today in an active rural congregation would have been impossible a few generations ago. The crowded schedule of a modern pastor includes not only activities and responsibilities in the congregation but also in the District, and sometimes the Synod.

Christ Church's records are a narrative of a congregation's life for 230 years. They tell a story of great trials, hardships, danger and discouragement. A central theme runs through this biography: The men and women who established the first parish in 1743 had faith, determination and courage. For more than two centuries these qualities have been passed on from generation to generation.

It was these attributes, and the leadership of dedicated pastors, which enabled Christ Church congregation to prosper and forge ahead spiritually.

Pastors Of Christ Church

Tobias Wagner 1743-1746

Johann Nicolas Kurtz 1746-1770

Christoph Emanuel Schulze 1770-1809

Daniel Ulrich 1811-1851

Lewis G. Eggers 1852-1867

Frederick P. Mayser 1868-1874

A. Johnson Long 1874-1909

William S. Dry 1909-1921

David F. Longacre 1922-1926

E. Richard Acker 1927-1929

Karl S. Henry 1930-1941

Luther N. Schaeffer 1941-1946

Martin L. Rothenberger 1947-1954

John O. Ballantine 1954-1956

George C. Myers, Jr. 1956-1964

Edwin P. Bastian 1965-1970

Lars Birger Staaby 1971-

RIETH'S CHURCH

First Lutheran church built by the Palatines, in 1727. Location: present site of Reed's Cemetery, one-half mile east of Stouchsburg.